

Troubled Brazil Holds Key Vote

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Brazilians are very fond of old sayings. One concerns the bumblebee, which, according to the laws of aerodynamics, cannot possibly fly. But the Brazilian will explain that the bumblebee does not know the laws of aerodynamics, and so he flies anyway.

For nearly a decade, Brazil has been the bumblebee of the Western Hemisphere, defying most known laws of economics in a headlong rush to "development." And Brazil has developed, in those years, to the point where it is the biggest, richest, and most important country in South America. It also has some of the biggest problems in South America, many of them just about ready to explode.

On Jan. 6, Brazilians went to the polls in a special plebiscite. Though it will take at least a week before the votes are counted and the results are official, and even longer before the real outcome is known, the vote will have a real bearing on the country's future.

President Joao "Jango" Goulart, a master politician, is working overtime to keep control of the nation. One high government official said privately last week that "unless radical changes are made very soon, Jango won't last three months." Many people don't even give him that long.

Whether Mr. Goulart goes—and when—will depend on how the various factions in Brazilian politics interpret the results of the plebiscite—which, more than anything else, was an attempt by the president to rally a vote of confidence for himself.

To the general public, the choice in the plebiscite was between two things: 1) a continuation of the present "strong parliament" system of government, imposed on Mr. Goulart when he moved up from vice president in 1961 to succeed Janio Quadros; or 2) a return to the former system of a powerful executive, "presidencialismo," which would give Mr. Goulart the same powers enjoyed by his predecessors. Mr. Goulart has been working toward this last, to the exclusion of nearly all else, ever since he took office.

Behind this apparently simple decision, however, lies Brazil's enormous economic mess.

Brazil is plagued by one of the worst inflationary spirals in the world. The

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